

Scottish Realism and the D&H (Part 1)

S. Robert Powell

A large number of the leaders and key figures in the history of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company and the Delaware and Hudson Railroad in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were either Scots by birth or of Scottish descent and subscribed to the common sense philosophy of Scottish realism. That common-sense philosophy, which developed in Scottish academic circles in the closing years of the eighteenth century, was a straightforward and sensible method of looking at life and considering its problems. That philosophy was fundamentally optimistic and established the philosophical validity of the fundamental self-evident truths that are now regarded as the basis of the American system.

Speaking of the Scottish approach to reality, Russel Blaine Nye, in *Society and Culture in America 1830-1860*, says: "The Scottish approach became the quasi-official philosophy of nineteenth-century America, generally accepted as the proper way to understand, direct, and control man's thoughts and actions. Few educated Americans, in the generations between 1790 and 1870, were not familiar with the concepts of the Scottish school. Its concepts, taught year by year to successive generations of college students, were a major influence in the development of American thought throughout the nineteenth century."

Education, then, as now, is important with the Scots. In the seventeenth century, schools in the Lowland parishes produced a literate population and a highly educated middle class. Remarkably, in Scotland, with a population of under a million people, there were, in the 15th and 16th centuries, four universities: St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh. In an under-developed Scottish economy, however, there was a shortage of middle class jobs, and this caused many Scots to leave Scotland for England, the Baltic states, and North America.

In the 1840s and early 1850s, a great many Highland Scots were forced to leave the land because of the "Clearances" that took place when the raising of sheep was introduced into Scotland. At the same time, many Lowland Scots, in order to improve their standard of living, left Scotland. In the first half of the 19th century, 59% of settlers from the United Kingdom were Scots-born. From 1853, half of emigrating Scots chose to settle in the United States in search of a better life.

Historians have commented on the 'high quality' of early Scottish settlers, particularly in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These emigrants were from middle-class backgrounds, among them doctors, merchants, farmers and a selection of other 'middle-class' occupations. However, the social status of emigrants underwent a significant transformation. Increasingly, emigrants from the Highlands were landless peasants and from the Lowlands unemployed craftsmen, laborers and small farmers.

Even though the number of persons of Scottish descent in the anthracite coal fields in northeastern Pennsylvania in the nineteenth century was relatively small, when compared to the Irish, Welsh, and German emigrants, for example, the prominence of persons of Scottish blood in the anthracite coal fields in the nineteenth century was very strong, with many Scots being upper echelon D&H railroad and mining managers and officials (James Archbald, Archibald Law, James Clarkson,

Alexander Bryden, John Hosie, John Campbell, J. H. McAlpine, James Dickson, Andrew Nichol, Archibald McNeal, among others), and many being community leaders and successful businessmen.

In the biographical portrait of John Hosie (Assistant Superintendent of the Delaware and Hudson coal mines at Carbondale) that is given in *1880* (p. 438J) we read: "Of the various nationalities which have become united in the New World, and which make up the American people, no nation has contributed a more sturdy or better element than has Scotland. Wherever, almost without exception, a son of Scotia is found you may be certain of finding an honest and useful citizen."

What is said of Alexander Shannon, a landscape architect who worked for the Wurts brothers and the D&H, in the biographical portrait of his son, John B. Shannon, in *Portrait and Biographical Record of Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania* (pp. 337-39) can be said of virtually all the Scots who came to America in the nineteenth century. "He (Alexander Shannon) was one of those sturdy, thrifty Scotchmen, who came to America to better their condition and at the same time made the country better for their having come." [emphasis added]

Here are some of the many remarkable Scots, all of whom were associated with the D&H, who, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, came to Carbondale and the Lackawanna Valley—which was "better for their having come" here:

JAMES ARCHBALD: James Archbald was one of the premier figures in the history of northeastern Pennsylvania in the nineteenth century. Through his mother, MaryAnn Wodrow, he descended from the Wodrow family, originally of England, but later of Renfrewshire, Scotland. His father was James Archbald, son of James Archbald of Knockendon, Ayrshire, Scotland. Following their marriage, on August 4, 1789, James Archbald's parents resided on Little Cumbræ Island, part of Buteshire, just off the coast of Ayrshire. There, on March 3, 1793, James Archbald was born. In 1807, the Archbald family removed to America and settled at Auriesville, Montgomery County, NY, where they purchased a farm. In 1817, when the construction of the Erie Canal was commenced, under the direction of John Jervis, James Archbald was hired by John Jervis to construct the portion of the Erie Canal that passed through his father's farm. (John Jervis was later hired by the Delaware & Hudson Canal to design and construct a railroad from Carbondale to Honesdale. John Jervis, in fact, designed the Gravity Railroad that opened on October 9, 1829.) At that time, James Archbald, a protégé of John Jervis, was named superintendent and resident engineer of the D&H Gravity Railroad. In 1845, the Gravity Railroad from Carbondale to Honesdale was restructured and extended to the south to Archbald, and James Archbald was the mastermind behind those revisions. In 1851, he was elected the first mayor of Carbondale, holding that office for four successive terms. He died on August 26, 1870, and his earthly remains are interred in the Archbald plot in Dunmore Cemetery.

ALEXANDER BARROWMAN: The Barrowman family originated in Scotland. William (the father of Alexander) was born in Glasgow in 1807, and in 1849, with his family, took passage on the sailing vessel, *Cora Linn*, which anchored in New York, after a voyage of fifty-four days. He then proceeded up the Hudson to Albany, and from there, via the Erie Canal to Buffalo, a trip that required eight days. Leaving his family in Buffalo, he went west in search of a suitable location for his family to live. Afterward, however, he decided to go to Blossburg, PA, and journeying to

Elmira by canal, he chanced to meet there James Archbald, Chief Engineer of the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company. Acting on advice of James Archbald, he came to Carbondale. For a time, William Barrowman was employed as foreman on the Gravity road, but afterward took the contract for sinking Pittston shaft No.1 and prospected for coal from Wilkes-Barre to Carbondale. He sank the Diamond shaft, the largest in the world at the time, having space for two carriages to go down and two to come up at the same time, besides ten feet of space for the pumps. This was first called the Barrowman shaft, but the name was afterward changed to the Diamond. In all matters connected with the sinking of shafts he was considered an authority. In 1865 he was killed by being accidentally thrown from his carriage. Among ten children [of William Barrowman], Alexander Barrowman was the third in order of birth. He was born in Glasgow in 1835 and was about fourteen years of age when the family came to the United States. After attending school for a time in Pittston, he was apprenticed to the carpenter's trade under William Price. Two years later he went from Pittston to Scranton, where he assisted his father for three years. He then began for himself a career as a stair builder and contractor, and built the majority of spiral stairs in northeastern Pennsylvania. He completed a stairway in the Episcopal Church of Wyoming that others thought could not be done and that is considered the finest work of the kind in the locality. / In August 1862, Mr. Barrowman volunteered in a pontoon train and was one of twelve mechanics in charge of the corps that constructed the pontoon bridge across the Rappahannock River at Chancellorsville during the Civil War.

JOSEPH BIRKETT: Joseph Birkett was one of the leading citizens of Carbondale in the second half of the nineteenth century. He was born January 19, 1823, in Cumberland, in the north of England. His father, John, and his mother, née Ruth Cragg, were both of Scotch ancestry, although they lived in Cumberlandshire. On April 4, 1849, Joseph Birkett and his wife, née Ann Drummond (born in England, of Scotch ancestry, on March 13, 1823; they were married in 1843), arrived in Philadelphia from their native land. On July 6 they reached Carbondale, where Joseph Birkett secured a position in the car shops of the D&H Railroad under Homer Grinnell, working there until 1854. He then went to Gibson for 2 years, working there in carpentry and farming. In 1856 he returned to Carbondale and again worked in the D&H car shops, until 1865, as assistant to Thomas Orchard. In 1865, Joseph Birkett purchased a tract of land in the thriving northeast part of the city, where he opened up coal mines. Those mines he operated for four years and then leased them to other parties. In the building up of the town of Carbondale, every worthy enterprise had his assistance. For two years he was a councilman, and for one year served as mayor of the city of Carbondale. Joseph Birkett's father, John and his grandfather, William, were both agents for the Dickson Manufacturing Company.

DAVID P. BIRTLEY: During the residence of his parents in Edinburgh, David P. Birtley was born, January 9, 1835. His early years were passed in that city, Glasgow, and Firth, where he was a pupil in private schools and where he worked in a bookbinding establishment. He was fifteen years old when the family came to America. He soon became a practical miner, and was employed in Schuylkill, Carbon, and Luzerne Counties. In May, 1856, he took a position as miner in the old Rockwell mine owned by John Jermyn, and afterward was inside foreman of the von Storch mine for about seven years. Resigning this position, he engaged in business about one year, then became foreman at the Dunn mines for John Jermyn and began the sinking of the shaft. Shortly afterward, he opened a mine at Priceburg, then became foreman at the Winton mine for the Winton Coal Company, and later was superintendent of the Northwest Colliery at Carbondale for Simpson &

Watkins for about one year. He later worked for the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company at the Marvine mine.

BRYCE RONALD BLAIR: On September 21, 1832, Bryce Blair was born in Glasgow, Scotland. Upon his arrival in America in November, 1852, he went to work for his uncle, Frank Blair, and was employed in the construction of the North Branch Canal at Tunkhannock. In 1853, he was engaged as superintendent of sections 30 and 31 of the Junction Canal in New York. In December, 1868, he was appointed chief engineer of the D&H rail line from Carbondale to Lanesboro (the Jefferson branch of the Erie Railway), which was built in 20 months at a cost of \$2,000,000.

HUGH BROWN: Hugh Brown was one of the eleven contractors who built the 1829 configuration of the Gravity Railroad under James Archbald's direction. He was born in 1776 in Ayr, Scotland, and emigrated, at age 44, to the United States about 1820, and established a farm in the Mohawk River Valley, where other families from Ayrshire, Scotland had earlier settled, among them the parents of James Archbald and family, who settled there in 1805. Brown's wife, née Mary Gibson (1798-1877), and their children born in Scotland joined Brown in America in 1823.

GEORGE BURRELL: George Burrell was born in Dundee, Scotland, in 1843, and came to Carbondale in the spring of 1850, and, in 1859, entered the service of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company. He was made foreman of general carpenter work in 1865, and became Master of Bridges and Buildings in 1875. He married Lucy J. Bair, of Carbondale.

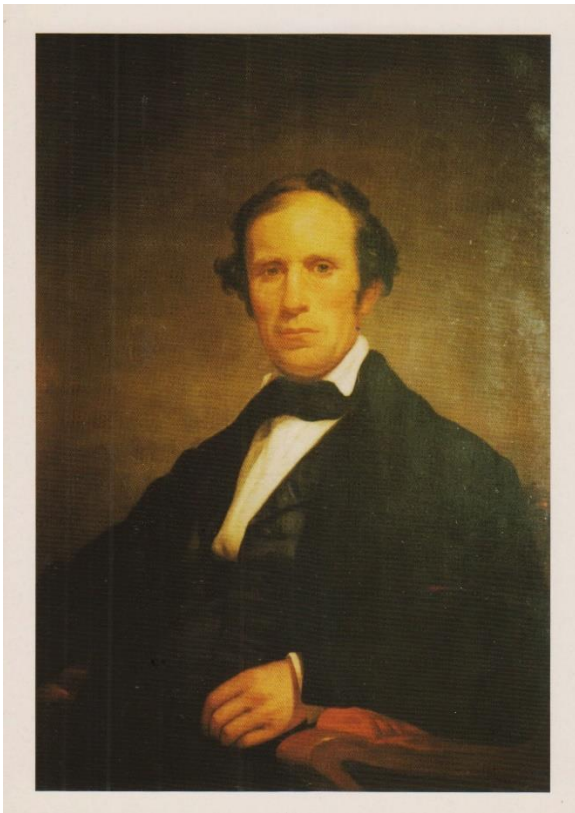
SILAS McMULLEN: Born October 9, 1836, in Clinton, Wayne County, Silas McMullen came to Carbondale on February 22, 1869, and on March 1, 1870 he was named Assistant Superintendent of the Pennsylvania Division of the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company's Division railroad. Under his supervision the locomotive road from Scranton to Carbondale was built. He was married to Louisa A. Hubbard of Wayne County."

ALEXANDER BRYDEN: Alexander Bryden was a shaft sinker and co-superintendent of the D&H mines. He was born in Daily Parish, Ayrshire, Scotland, March 6, 1799. He was brought up about the coal mines of Ayrshire and became a coal miner, shaft sinker, and mine foreman. In 1836 he leased a coal work upon the Polquhirter estate at New Cumrock, Ayrshire. He also leased a coal work upon the Downieston estate, at Patna, which was drowned out by the River Doon breaking into it. In 1842, he emigrated to America, and came directly to Carbondale. In July of that year, work was very dull, and hard to get about the mines, and he took such work as he could get. His first work for the Delaware & Hudson Canal company was with Hugh Brown, foreman of day laborers, but very soon he was given charge of the pumps which drained the water from the deep mines. In March 1843, he was appointed mine foreman, to take the place of Archibald Law, who was permanently disabled by a fall of roof and coal. Alexander Bryden was the hero of the Carbondale 1846 mine cave-in rescue efforts.

JOHN CAMPBELL: Born in Scotland, March 1, 1805, he served seven years in the British army, after which he settled in Carbondale. He became a mine boss in 1854, and served as school director six years and as overseer of poor for five years. He married Miss Mary Fairchild, of Hanover township, Luzerne County.

JAMES CLARKSON: Born in Hermonch, Scotland, James Clarkson emigrated to America in 1830 and eventually settled in Carbondale, where, with Peter Campbell, he established a partnership that was hired by the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company as contractors. Clarkson was soon appointed D&H Superintendent of Mines, which position he held for 30 years. He died on November 10, 1876.

JOHN BLOOMFIELD JERVIS: Named Chief Engineer of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company, March 14, 1827; he served in that capacity until 1829. John Jervis designed the Gravity Railroad that opened on October 9, 1829.



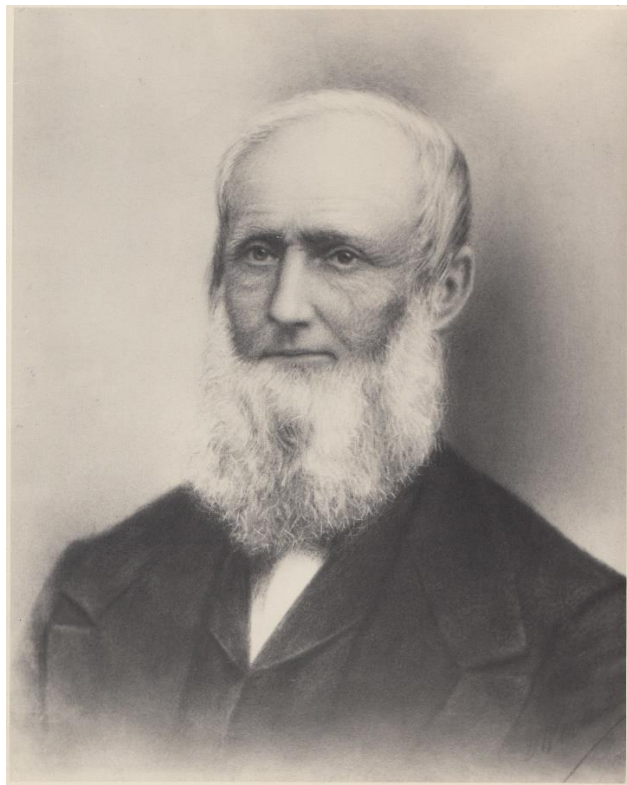
James Archbald



Bryce Blair



Silas McMullen



John B. Jervis

(Part 2 to follow)

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